

Rules of the Game

Polymorphing Revisited (Part Four)

By Skip Williams



Previously in this series, we've examined what happens to a creature when it assumes a new form through the **alternate form special quality**. Characters, especially **player characters**, have an unfortunate habit of piling on magical effects. This week, we'll start a quick look at how various magical enhancements stack with the alternate form power. We'll also look at a character who assumes several different forms.

Alternate Form and Stacking

Rules of the Game has examined [stacking magical effects](#) before. That series, however, dealt mostly with the rules regarding combining bonuses from magical effects. Changing forms tends to be a little less straightforward.

The rules on combining magical effects on pages 171 and 172 in the *Player's Handbook* contain the key to handling an alternate form's interactions with other magic.

Alternate form doesn't provide any **bonuses** or **penalties** to combine with other magical effects -- it works changes that alter the user's physical attributes. Any magic that provides a numerical bonus or penalty affects a creature in an alternate form normally. For example, a *bull's strength* spell works on a creature no matter what form it's in. If a creature receives a bonus, such as an **enhancement bonus** to an **ability score**, before changing form it retains that bonus when it changes form. Just apply the bonus to whatever basic attribute the new form provides. For example, if the creature changes into a troll, it gains a **Strength** score of 23. If it also has a +4 enhancement bonus to Strength from a *bull's strength*, it effectively has a Strength score of 27 while it remains in troll form and while the *bull's strength* spell lasts.

Effects that work some sort of physical change on the recipient fall under the rules for effects that render each other irrelevant. For example, spells such as *fins to feet* and *girallon's blessing* from the *Spell Compendium* both transform the recipient physically (the former turns a creature's swimming fins or tail into motive legs useful on land, the latter spell causes the recipient to literally grow an extra set of arms). Since a creature gains the assumed form's body layout and limbs upon changing, the change in form makes either spell irrelevant. For example, if a creature using either spell assumes the form of a horse through alternate form, it becomes a typical horse, with four legs and four feet with hooves. If the creature later reverts to its original form, either spell still applies to the creature, provided the spell's duration hasn't run out.

It's worth noting, however, that the order in which these effects are applied is significant. If the recipient of a *girallon's blessing* spell has assumed the form of a horse, it grows two arms that end in claws (because a horse has no arms, see the spell's description). If the creature later reverts to its original form, it loses the extra arms (they belong with the horse's altered body).

An Alternate Form Example

One common character ability affected by the new rule for **polymorphing** is the **druid's** wild shape ability, which now works like the alternate form special quality instead of the *polymorph* spell. Let's take a look at Mirye, a 6th-level druid who often changes into the form of a leopard, viper, or eagle.

I'd like to call your attention to the differences between Mirye's statistics as an eagle and the statistics for Nydia, her eagle animal companion. When Mirye assumes eagle form, her statistics are based on a typical eagle, not on an eagle that has improved through becoming an animal companion.

Also consider what happens to Mirye's equipment. The things she carries meld into her assumed forms (all animals) and become nonfunctional. Her *ring of protection* arguably fits on her talons when she becomes an eagle and it might also fit on the leopard's stubby toes. The errata file for the *Player's Handbook*, however, specifically states that a druid's equipment melds into the assumed form when she wild shapes. Any new items worn in the assumed form fall off and land at the druid's feet when she takes her normal form.

The errata also says that a druid regains lost **hit points** as if she had rested for a night each time she uses wild shape. (An important change to remember.)

From page 37 of the *Player's Handbook* (adjusted for errata):

Wild Shape (Su): At 5th level, a druid gains the ability to turn herself into any Small or Medium animal and back again once per day. Her options for new forms include all creatures with the animal type (see the *Monster Manual*). **This ability functions like the alternate form special ability (see the *Monster Manual*), except as noted here.** The effect lasts for 1 hour per druid level, or until she changes back. Changing form (to animal or back) is a standard action and doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity. The form chosen must be that of an animal the druid is familiar with. For example, a druid who has never been outside a temperate forest could not become a polar bear. **Each time you use wild shape, you regain lost hit points as if you had rested for a night.**

Any gear worn or carried by the druid melds into the new form and becomes nonfunctional. When the druid reverts to her true form, any objects previously melded into the new form reappear in the same location on her body that they previously occupied and are once again functional. Any new items worn in the assumed form fall off and land at the druid's feet.

A druid loses her ability to speak while in animal form because she is limited to the sounds that a normal, untrained animal can make, but she can communicate normally with other animals of the same general grouping as her new form. (The normal sound a wild parrot makes is a squawk, so changing to this form does not permit speech.)

Mirye CR 6

Female human **druid** 6

NG Medium humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan

AC 19, touch 13, **flat-footed** 17

(+2 Dex, +5 natural, +4 armor, +2 shield, +1 deflection)

hp 37 (6 HD)

Resist +4 against spell-like abilities of fey

Fort +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +9

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee mwk scimitar +5 (1d6/18-20) or

Ranged mwk sling +7 (1d4)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +4

Special Actions wild shape 2/day (6 hours)

Combat Gear two scrolls of *cure light wounds*, scroll of *cure moderate wounds*, scroll of *quench*

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 6th):

3rd -- *dominate animal* (DC 16), *greater magic fang*, *produce flame* (empowered, +4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch)

2nd -- *barkskin*, *cat's grace*, *chill metal* (DC 15), *summon swarm*

1st -- *cure light wounds*, *entangle* (DC 14), *produce flame* (+4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch), *speak with animals*

0 -- *detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *mending*, *virtue*

Abilities **Str** 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 11

SQ animal companion, link with companion, trackless step, wild empathy +6 (+2 magical beasts)

Feats Athletic, Empower Spell, Track

Skills Climb +4, Concentration +8, Handle Animal +7, Heal +10, Knowledge (nature) +12, Listen +5, Ride +4, Spot +5, Survival +14 (+16 above ground), Swim +1

Possessions combat gear plus +1 *hide armor*, heavy wooden shield, *ring of protection* +1, masterwork scimitar, masterwork sling, 10 bullets, *cloak of resistance* +1, silver and amber brooch (10 gp), 20 sp

Nydia Animal Companion CR --

N Small animal

Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Listen +6, Spot +14

AC 19, touch 14, flat-footed 16

(+1 size, +3 Dex, +5 natural)

hp 27 (5 HD)

Resist evasion

Fort +8, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2 (+6 against enchantment spells and effects)

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 80 ft. (average)

Melee 2 talons +7 (1d4+1) and

bite +2 (1d4)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +0

Abilities **Str** 12, **Dex** 17, **Con** 12, **Int** 2, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 6

SQ tricks (hunting, come, defend, guard, stay)

Feats Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills Hide +7, Listen +6, Spot +14

Mirye (Leopard Form) CR 6

Female human druid 6

NG Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +5

Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan

AC 15, touch 14, flat-footed 11

(+4 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 37 (6 HD)

Resist +4 against spell-like abilities of fey

Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +8

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), climb 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee bite +7 (1d6+3) and

2 claws +2 (1d3+1)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +7

Atk Options improved grab, pounce, rake (1d3+1)

Special Actions wild shape 2/day (6 hours)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 6th; cannot cast spells with verbal and somatic components):

3rd -- *dominate animal* (DC 16), *greater magic fang*, *produce flame* (empowered, +4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch)

2nd -- *barkskin*, *cat's grace*, *chill metal* (DC 15), *summon swarm*

1st -- *cure light wounds*, *entangle* (DC 14), *produce flame* (+4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch), *speak with animals*

0 -- *detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *mending*, *virtue*

Abilities Str 16, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 11

SQ animal companion, link with companion, trackless step, wild empathy +6 (+2 magical beasts)

Feats Athletic, Empower Spell, Track

Skills Balance +12, Climb +19, Concentration +9, Handle Animal +7, Heal +10, Hide +8, Knowledge (nature) +12, Listen +5, Move Silently +8, Ride +6, Spot +5, Survival +14 (+16 above ground), Swim +12

Mirye (Small Viper Form) CR 6

Female human druid 6

NG Small humanoid

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +9, Spot +9

Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan

AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14

(+1 size, +3 Dex, +3 natural)

hp 37 (6 HD)

Resist +4 against spell-like abilities of fey

Fort +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +8

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares), climb 20 ft. (4 squares), swim 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee bite +3 (1d2-2 plus poison)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** -2

Atk Options poison (DC 13, 1d6 Con damage/1d6 Con damage)

Special Actions wild shape 2/day (6 hours)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 6th; cannot cast spells with verbal and somatic components):

3rd -- *dominate animal* (DC 16), *greater magic fang*, *produce flame* (empowered, +4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch)

2nd -- *barkskin*, *cat's grace*, *chill metal* (DC 15), *summon swarm*

1st -- *cure light wounds*, *entangle* (DC 14), *produce flame* (+4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch), *speak with animals*

0 -- *detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *mending*, *virtue*

Abilities Str 6, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 11

SQ animal companion, link with companion, trackless step, wild empathy +6 (+2 magical beasts)

Feats Athletic, Empower Spell, Track

Skills Balance +11, Climb +14, Concentration +7, Handle Animal +7, Heal +10, Hide +11, Knowledge (nature) +12, Listen +9, Ride +5, Spot +9, Survival +14 (+16 above ground), Swim +17

Mirye (Eagle Form) CR 6

Female human druid 6

NG Small humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +5, Spot +13

Languages Common, Druidic, Sylvan

AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 12

(+1 size, +2 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 37 (6 HD)

Resist +4 against spell-like abilities of fey

Fort +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +8

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 80 ft. (16 squares)

Melee 2 talons +5 (1d4) and

bite +0 (1d4)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +0

Special Actions wild shape 2/day (6 hours)

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 6th; cannot cast spells with verbal and somatic components):

3rd -- *dominate animal* (DC 16), *greater magic fang*, *produce flame* (empowered, +4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch)

2nd -- *barkskin*, *cat's grace*, *chill metal* (DC 15), *summon swarm*

1st -- *cure light wounds*, *entangle* (DC 14), *produce flame* (+4 melee touch or +6 ranged touch), *speak with animals*

0 -- *detect magic* (2), *guidance*, *mending*, *virtue*

Abilities Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 11

SQ animal companion, link with companion, trackless step, wild empathy +6 (+2 magical beasts)

Feats Athletic, Empower Spell, Track

Skills Climb +8, Concentration +8, Handle Animal +7, Heal +10, Knowledge (nature) +12, Listen +5, Ride +4, Spot +13, Survival +14 (+16 above ground), Swim +9

In Conclusion

That wraps up our discussion of polymorphing this time around. I hope that you find the guidance provided herein useful in your games!

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old

farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

©1995-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **www.wizards.com/d20**. ©2001-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd